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## Quenti Lambardillion

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## Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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### Abstract

Examines the languages of Men in Middle-earth, and how they are represented by kinships with languages of our own world.

# Quenti Lambardillion

## A Column on Middle-earth Linguistics

### Paul Nolan Hyde

During the past year, we have presented material on the use of the Tengwar in the Middle-earth volumes, intermingled with a treatise or two concerning the morphological structures of Quenya and Sindarin. We thought that it might be valuable at this point to shift emphasis momentarily in order to broaden our perspective regarding the languages of Middle-earth in general by discussing the languages of Men in particular.

Although Tolkien provided some linguistic material to indicate that he invented languages for the various races of Men in Middle-earth<sup>1</sup>, he did not give enough to develop a working grammar. Anyone who has read the Middle-earth fantasies, however, is well aware of the fact that the Men of Middle-earth do speak in tongues other than English or Elvish. As it turns out, however, these languages are historical languages of the real world adapted by Tolkien to convey the cultural relationships between the various races of Men. As Tolkien himself explained to Naomi Mitchinson in April of 1954 (after offering to send her a copy of some material "dealing with Languages (and Writing), Peoples and Translation"):

The latter has given me much thought. It seems seldom regarded by other creators of imaginary worlds, however gifted as narrators (such as Eddison). But then I am a philologist, and much though I should like to be more precise on other cultural aspects and features, that is not within my competence. Anyway 'language' is the most important, for the story has to be told, and the dialog conducted in a language; but English cannot have been the language of the people of that time. What I have, in fact done, is to equate the Westron or wide-spread Common Speech of the Third Age with English; and translate everything, including names such as "The Shire", that was in the Westron into English terms, with some differentiation of style to represent dialectal differences. Languages quite alien to C. S. have been left alone. Except for a few scraps in the Black Speech of Mordor, and a few names and a battle cry in Dwarvish, these are almost entirely Elvish (Eldarin).

Languages, however, that were related to the Westron presented a special problem. I turned them into forms of speech related to

English. Since the Rohirrim are represented as recent comers out of the North, and users of an Archaic Mannish language relatively untouched by the influence of Eldarin, I have turned their names into forms like (but not identical with) Old English. The language of the Dale and the Long Lake would, if it appeared, be represented as more or less Scandinavian in character; but it is only represented by a few names, especially those of the Dwarves that came from that region. These are all Old Norse Dwarf-names. (The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, pp. 174-5.)

In Appendix F of The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien explains this procedure further with regard to the Hobbits:

In some old families, especially those of Fallohide origin such as the Took and the Bolgers, it was, however, the custom to give high sounding first-names. Since most of these seem to have been drawn from legends of the past, of Men as well as of Hobbits, and many while now meaningless to Hobbits closely resembled the names of Men in the Vale of Anduin, or in the Dale, or in the Mark, I have turned them into those old names, largely of Frankish and Gothic origin, that are still used by us or are met in our histories. Names of Classical origin have rarely been used for the nearest equivalents to Latin and Greek in Shire-lore were the Elvish tongues, and those the Hobbits seldom used in nomenclature. Few of them at any time knew the languages of the kings', as they called them.

The names of the Bucklanders were different from those of the rest of the Shire. The folk of the Marish and their offshoot across the Brandywine were in many ways peculiar, as has been told. It was from the former language of the Southern Stoors, no doubt, that they inherited many of their very odd names. These I have left unaltered, for if queer now, they were queer in their own day. They had a style which we should perhaps feel vaguely to be 'Celtic'.

Since the survival of traces of the older languages of the

Stoors and the Bree-men resembled the survival of Celtic elements in England, I have sometimes imitated the latter in my translation. Thus, Bree, Combe (Coomb), Archet, and Chetwood are modeled on relics of British nomenclature, chosen according to sense: Bree 'hill', chet 'wood'. But only one personal name has been altered in this way. Meriadoc was chosen to fit the fact that this character's shortened name, Kali, meant in the Westron 'jolly, gay', and though it was actually an abbreviation of the now unmeaning Buckland name Kalimac. (The Lord of the Rings, III, Houghton Mifflin, 1965)

Several writers have published extensive studies on Tolkien's use of historical languages, among the finest being John Tinker's essay on the language of Rohan<sup>2</sup> and Jim Allen's treatment of the real languages in his An Introduction to Elvish. Appendix C of my dissertation (Purdue, 1982) compiles all of the morphological elements adapted from the historical languages of the real world. Much of the material in the Notes regarding language cognates represents a collation of the research done by Tinker, Allen, and others, together with the glossaries published by Tolkien and his son.<sup>3</sup> To this was added quotes from the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) in cases where otherwise opaque elements were clarified as to their etymological roots. This is particularly true with regard to the Hobbitish flower names. Anyone interested in that glossary may contact me directly.

By combining Tolkien's commentary on the various dialects and languages used in the translation process with the material in Appendix C, another of Tolkien's techniques for portraying racial character through external means can be discerned. By plotting the locations of the real language usage on the maps of Middle-earth, the relationship between geography and language is easily seen.

By superimposing the names of the historical languages on a map of Middle-earth thereby locating the places where they were spoken, it is easy to see that the physical relationship of the language areas to each other is quite similar to the physical relationship that those same languages have had in the real world. The Celtic languages are beyond the Misty mountains as they are in Great Britain (Welsh, Irish, and Highland Scot). The Old English of the Rohirrim is located in the south-central part of Middle-earth which compares favorably to the physical location of the Anglo-Saxon dialect in which Tolkien chose to portray his horsemen. It is interesting that the Rohirrim language does not apparently influence the western Celtic languages, but both "Deeping Coombe" and "Carrock" are Celtic incursions into the Mannish languages of the Valley of the Anduin, reflective of the place name borrowings

from Welsh found in Old English. The languages of the River Running and of eastern Mirkwood are primarily Gothic, the sole representative of the eastern branch of eastern Mirkwood are primarily Gothic, the sole representative of the eastern branch of the Germanic language family. For the northern parts of Middle-earth Tolkien borrows from the Scandinavian languages, predominately Old Norse. All of the Mannish names for the Dwarves of Erebor are taken from the Elder Edda. Gandalf's name is from the same source as is the name given to him by the inhabitants of the North (LR III, p. 279). Most fascinating are the languages of the southern portions of Middle-earth. In the south-west are found many Pre-Numenorean names. Tolkien says of this area of the spread of Westron:

In the days of the Numenorean kings this ennobled Westron speech spread far and wide, even among their enemies; and it became used more and more by the Dunedain themselves, so that at the time of the War of the Ring the Elven tongue was known to only a small part of the peoples of Gondor, and spoken daily by fewer. These dwelt mostly in Minas Tirith and the townlands adjacent, and in the land of the tributary princes of Dol Amroth. Yet the names of nearly all places and persons in the realm of Gondor were of Elvish form and meaning. A few were of forgotten origin, and descended doubtless from days before the ships of the Numenoreans sailed the Sea; among these were "Umbar", "Arnach" and "Erech"; and the mountain-names of "Eilenach" and "Rimmon". "Forlong" was also a name of the same sort. (LR III, p. 407)

What is interesting here is that many of these place names are from the Middle-east of the real world. Even "Lebennin", Elvish for "seven waters" is reminiscent of Mount Lebanon of the Hebrew Scriptures. As Jim Allen suggests, these names "give a slightly eastern flavor to Gondor to the modern reader, and help suggest its antiquity" (Allen, op. cit., p. 174.) What is extraordinary is that this appeal to eastern antiquity is limited to the land south of the White Mountains. Coupled with this oblique reference to the Semitic languages in the south-west of Gondor is the hint at the Slavonic languages in the south-east. Again, Allen makes a critical observation:

Another language or language group probably gives the name Khand, applied to a land of the southeast of Mordor. Tolkien refers to the Variags of the Khand who fight in the Battle of the Pelennor (III: 121, 123). Variag may be the true name for the inhabitants of Khand, but Variag also occurs as a Russian name...for the Varangian Guard, the Norse body-guard of the Emperors of

Constantinople. The Norse form of their name, Voeringl, means 'sworn ones' and refers to their status as mercenaries sworn to the service of the Emperor. The Variags founded Kiev. (Ibid., p. 174-5)

In the south-east part of Middle-earth, then, the feeling of antiquity is maintained through an oblique reference to Greek culture, an appropriate complement to the Semitic culture undertone in the south-west. Tolkien's choice of the Norse mercenaries coincides with his northwest European temperament (Letters, p. 212)

A similar kind of language mapping can be done with the map of The Shire included in The Fellowship of the Ring. Three-Farthing Stone is (as Sam would undoubtedly put it) "as near the center of the Shire as no matter" (LR III, p. 303) and represents the administrative joining point of West Farthing, East Farthing, and South Farthing. The boundary line for North Farthing lies a few miles north of Hobbiton. Although Tolkien does not show where Tighfield and Gamwich are, apparently they are in North Farthing. Sam's family originates in these towns and although Sam is born in Hobbiton, he has personal knowledge of North Farthing. (LR II, p. 257) Halfast, Sam's cousin, hunts in North Farthing (LR I, p. 53); Halfred, Sam's brother, moved to North Farthing from Hobbiton (LR III, p. 383) Other than Hobbiton itself, North Farthing is mentioned more in conjunction with the Gamgees than with any other part of the Shire. The given names of Sam's family are predominately composed of Old and Middle English elements (Ibid.) As was indicated above, Eastfarthing was inhabited mainly by Merry's family. The personal names of the Bucklanders and the Marish are those of the Celtic flavor. (LR III, p. 382) Pippin's ancestors settled in Tuckborough and in the surrounding hill country. Although Tuckborough is located in the West Farthing, it is the major town south of Hobbiton and the East Road. Peregrin's name and those of his relatives are primarily of Frankish and Gothic origin. (LR III, p. 381) The family of Bilbo and Frodo had lived in Hobbiton, as Tolkien says, "for time out of mind" (Hobbit, p. 15) and most of the names are primarily of Spanish influence and construction (LR III, p. 380), a language for which Tolkien had great fondness. (Letters, p. 213-4) A perusal of the genealogical table found in Appendix B of The Lord of the Rings reveals a striking consistency of linguistic sensitivity which is geographically and family based. The interaction of the Hobbits with each other is undoubtedly founded in part on these kinds of linguistic differences.

As a side-note: if Hobbiton is considered as the center of the Shire, with Frodo as its representative, then Pippin represents the South, Merry the East, Sam the North, and they all find true leadership from an unknown and mysterious West-man, Strider the Dunedain.

A multiplicity of areas for further investigation could be pursued if one assumes the above to be accurate about what Tolkien is doing with the real historical languages. For example, if these linguistic differences between the various families of Men and Hobbits are real and Tolkien is fully aware of them, should there not be some sort of consistent difference in their speech patterns when they speak Westron or in the English into which the Westron has been translated? That this is the case to a degree is substantiated by Tolkien in a letter to Terence Tiller wherein he instructs Tiller about "accents" in the BBC's radio production of The Lord of the Rings:

I have no doubt that if this 'history' were real, all users of the C[ommon] Speech would reveal themselves by their accent, differing in place, people, and rank, but that cannot be represented when C. S. is turned into English--and it is not (I think) necessary. I paid great attention to such linguistic differentiation as was possible: in diction, idiom, and so on; and I doubt if much more can be imported, except in so far as the individual actor represents his feeling for the character in tone and style.

As Minas Tirith is at the source of C Speech it is to C. S. as London is to Modern English, and the standard of comparison. None of its inhabitants should have an 'accent' in terms of vowels etc.

The Rohirrim no doubt (as our ancient English ancestors in a similar state of culture and society) spoke, at least in their own tongue, with a slower tempo and more sonorous articulation, than modern 'urbans'. I think it is safe to represent them when using C. S. as they practically always do (for obvious reasons) as speaking the best M[inas] T[irith]. Possibly a little too good, as it would be a learned language, somewhat slower and more careful than a native's. But that is a nicety safely neglected, and not always true: Theoden was born in Gondor and C. S. was the domestic language of the Golden Hall in his father's day (Return of the King p. 350). (Ibid., p. 254)

Tolkien's attention to diction and idiom ought to be measurable if as much attention was taken as he avers. An interesting study might be done on the dialectical differences among the various races of Men as to idiom and word usage as compared to the vocabulary and syntax of the languages Tolkien employs to represent the native languages. That is, do the Men of the Dale have a more Scandinavian lilt to their speech patterns as com-

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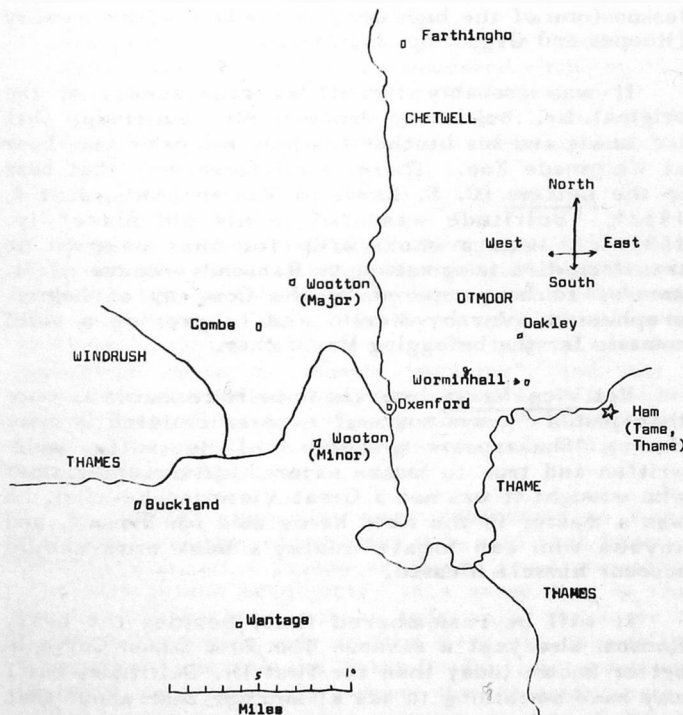
"Haradric" *Inkà-nùs* 'North-spy' (*Unfinished Tales*, p. 399) or as a Quenya word (UT, p. 400). He did keep such mythologically resonant puns as *Atalante* and *Avalloë*.

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#### REFINING THE MAP OF THE LITTLE KINGDOM

I was delighted to see the map of the Little Kingdom drawn by Rod Walker in *Mythlore* 37, honored that Rod mentioned my initial suggestion that such a map should be drawn, and stimulated to do more research in the matter -- since Ham, Worminghall, Oakley and Farthingho are marked in only "Approximate location"..."from descriptions of where places are located, rather than seeing the actual dots on a printed page." I rushed to the Library of Brigham Young University and obtained a map of Oxfordshire. The first town I found was Worminghall, which turns out to be four miles west-by-northwest from Thame. This agrees with indications given by Tolkien: "four miles north-west of Tame...Aula Draconaris, or in the vulgar Worminghall..." The agreement is conditional on two assumptions: 1) That "north-west" is a loose approximation for "west-by-northwest;" and 2) That "Tame" is a variant spelling of "Thame" -- but we need not make the effort to assume the second fact, since one of the wise clerks of Oxenford has already told us that it is so indeed: "Ham...by a natural confusion between the Lord of Ham and the Lord of Tame, became known by the latter name, which it retains to this day; for Thame with an *h* is a folly without warrant." (Tolkien, *Farmer Giles*, pp. 76-77). So we have also found Ham, renamed Tame (today misspelled Thame, but retaining the former pronunciation).



Since Worminghall was founded "upon the spot where Giles and Chrysophylax first made acquaintance" (Chrysophylax, Greek for "goldlover," surnamed Dives, Latin for "rich," is the dragon of the story), and the farmer met the dragon on his way to Oakley (Ibid., p. 30), we may look for the latter in the vicinity of Worminghall -- and sure enough, there it is, just to miles to the north.

Finally, Farthingho was found 20 miles north of Oxenford, in Northamptonshire, a little to the east of Banbury. Here, in a time after Giles, his son Georgius had "at one time an outpost against the Middle Kingdom" (p. 8), which must therefore be to the north. Its capital "was some twenty leagues distant from Ham" (p. 20). A league is three miles, according both to my dictionary and to *Unfinished Tales* (p. 284). Sixty miles north of Tame (or Thame) is Ratae Coritanorum (Ratae of the Coritans), also known as Leicester. This must be the capital of the Middle Kingdom.

The most wonderful discovery made by Walker, surpassing even Buckland and Wantage, is that of Wooton. Thus, the practice of binding together the adventures of Giles and Smith in one volume is shown to be justified. This Wooton, south of Oxford, is probably Minor, since a larger town named Wootton is north of Oxford. In the same area is the village of Combe, which shares its name with a village in Bree-land.

I have enjoyed these explorations, in which I have followed, *quodam modo*, in the footsteps of Rod Walker, to whom I am most grateful. Ross Christensen lent me two books that helped me in the research.



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pared with, say, the Men of Bree who are supposed to be more Celtic than not? It must be so if, as Tolkien says, the Rohirrim differ in this way. If the study did not show a definite correlation between the English translations and the real languages, could those patterns then be reflective of the invented languages for Men which are not given in the published works? The Hobbits, too, undoubtedly differ in this way. The question here would be essentially the same. Does Merry use Celtic speech patterns and Pippin Goth? Does Frodo use Spanish patterns? Does Sam follow a Middle English pattern? Another important discovery to be made through further study of the real languages would involve the correlation between the personal relationships in the trilogy and the languages which are spoken by those involved in those relationships. Are Merry and Pippin drawn to Theoden and Denethor for linguistic reasons?

There is no doubt that these questions and others can be successfully pursued. Tolkien's sensitivity for linguistic characterization transcends the obvious and displays a genius for detail.

#### NOTES

- 1 See Appendix A in my *Linguistic Techniques Used to Develop Character in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* and Jim Allen's *An Introduction to Elvish*.
- 2 Issacs, op. cit., 164-9.
- 3 The *Silmarillion*; *Unfinished Tales*; Lobdell, *A Tolkien Compass* (LaSalle, PA: Open Court, 1975), 153-201.